FORGOTTEN WITNESS: EVIDENCE FOR
THE EARLY CODIFICATION OF THE QURʾĀN*

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Three kinds of historical evidence are examined here that have not previously been seriously con-
sidered in relation to the question of codification. The Umayyad inscriptions from the Dome of the Rock
have generally been ignored or dismissed because of apparent departures from the “canonical” text,
as represented by the Cairo edition; here they are analyzed for the evidence they nonetheless provide
for the state of the Qurʾānic text toward the end of the first hijrī century. Equally informative are al-
Wald’s inscriptions at the Great Mosque of al-Madinah, datable about twenty years later; they were
described by eyewitnesses in the first half of the tenth century, when they were still partly visible.
Finally, from scattered indications it is suggested that there was a group of professional Qurʾān copyists
at al-Madinah at the end of the first and the beginning of the second century.

† Estelle Whelan died on 13 October 1997 (ed.).

IN THE LAST TWO DECADES a controversy has arisen
over the period in which the text of Muslim scripture
became codified. The traditional Islamic view can be
summarized as follows.1 Both Abū Bakr (A.H. 11–13/
A.D. 632–34) and ʿUmar (13–23/634–44) made efforts to
gather together the scraps of revelation that had been
written down by the faithful during the lifetime of the
Prophet, on bones, on palm leaves, on potsherds, and on
whatever other materials were at hand, as well as being
preserved in “the breasts of men.”2 But it was the third
caliph, ʿUthmān (23–35/644–61), who first charged a
small group of men at al-Madinah with codifying and
standardizing the text. Alarmed by reported divergences
in the recitation of the revelation, he commissioned one
of the Prophet’s former secretaries, Zayd b. Thābit, and
several prominent members of Quraysh—ʿAbd Allāh b.
al-Zubayr, Saʿīd b. al-ʿĀṣ, and ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. al-
Hārith—are those most often mentioned—to produce a
standard copy of the text, based on the compilation in

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1 The classic Western study of the history of the text as
preserved in Muslim tradition is T. Nöldeke, Geschichte des
useful brief summaries, with references, see W. M. Watt, Bell’s
Introduction to the Qurʾān (Edinburgh, 1970); A. T. Welch and

2 Nöldeke, 13.

the keeping of Ḥafṣah, daughter of ʿUmar. If there was
disagreement over language among members of the com-
mission, it was to be resolved in accordance with the
dialect spoken by Quraysh. Once the standard text had
been established, several copies were made and sent to
major cities in the Islamic domain, specifically Damas-
cus, al-ʾBaṣrāh, al-Kūfah, and perhaps others. Although
there are variations in detail, for example, in the list of
names of those who served on ʿUthmān’s commission
and in the list of cities to which copies were sent, this
basic outline is not in dispute within the Muslim world.

Oral recitation nevertheless remained the preferred
mode of transmission, and, as time passed, variant ver-
sions of the text proliferated—the kind of organic change
that is endemic to an oral tradition. In addition, because
of the nature of the early Arabic script, in which short
vowels were not indicated and consonants of similar form
were only sometimes distinguished by pointing, writing,
too, was subject to misunderstanding, copyist’s error,
and change over time. In the early tenth century, at Bagh-
dad, Abū Bakr Ibn Muḥājīd (d. 324/936) succeeded in
reducing the number of acceptable readings to the seven
that were predominant in the main Muslim centers of the
time: al-Madinah, Makkah, Damascus, al-ʾBaṣrāh, and
al-Kūfah. Some Qurʾān readers who persisted in devi-
at from these seven readings were subjected to draconian punishm ents. Nevertheless, with the passage of
time, additional variant readings were readmitted, first
“the three after the seven,” then “the four after the ten.”

The modern Cairo edition, prepared at al-Azhar in the
1920s, is based on one of the seven readings permitted
by Ibn Mujāhid, that of Abū Bakr ĀSIM (d. ca. 127/745) as transmitted by Ḥafṣ b. Sulaymān (d. 180/796).

Early efforts by Muslim scholars to establish the sequence of the revelation, particularly the verses revealed at Makkah and those revealed at al-Madīnah, were emulated by European scholars, who focused on similar problems, though often adopting somewhat different criteria for determining solutions. Nevertheless, already in the early twentieth century Alphonse Mingana seriously challenged the entire historical framework outlined here. Mingana, whose approach was patently tendentious, argued that the Qurʾānic had not been codified in book form until several decades later than was generally accepted, in the reign of the fifth Umayyad caliph, ʿAbd al-Malik b. Marwān (65–86/685–705). In the 1970s John Wansbrough went much farther, concluding, on the basis of textual and linguistic analysis, that there is no evidence for a “canonical” version of the Qurʾānic text before the very end of the eighth century at the earliest.

Wansbrough argued that the nature of the text itself presupposes “an organic development from originally independent traditions during a long period of transmission . . . juxtaposition of independent pericopes to some extent unified by means of a limited number of rhetorical conventions.” In support of his conclusion he noted that Muslim traditions about early revelation, indeed about the life of the Prophet and early Muslim history as a whole, are known only from later Islamic literature; Qurʾānic exegesis, for example, first evolved in the late eighth and ninth centuries. Nor can most early Muslim traditions be confirmed in contemporary non-Muslim sources. Wansbrough’s entire analysis was based on the assumption that the “canonization” of the Qurʾānic text and its role in the development of the Muslim community followed a trajectory similar to that of Hebrew scripture. For example, in connection with “exegetical” (Wansbrough’s characterization of much of the content of the Sirah of Ibn Iṣḥāq, ca. 85–150/704–67, edited by Ibn Hishām, d. 218/833) reports of material that also appears in the “canon,” he declared: “For Hebrew scripture the priority in time of such reports over the actual reproduction in literary form of prophetical utterances has been established. To postulate a similar, if not identical, process for Muslim scripture seems to me not unjustified, though in this particular instance complicated by the redaction history of the Sira itself.” He also cited “the likelihood of a Rabbinic model for the account of an authoritative text produced in committee, namely the Jamnia tradition on the canonization of Hebrew scripture.” The vastly different historical contexts in which these supposedly parallel processes took place were not explicitly recognized or taken into account in Wansbrough’s literary analysis. In fact the results of this analysis were frequently cited as grounds for rejecting the supposed historical evidence presented in such texts as the Sirah. By means of this reasoning Wansbrough arrived at the conclusion that “concern with the text of scripture did not precede by much the appearance of the masoretic [exegetical] literature as it has in fact been preserved”: that is, in his view the Qurʾānic text assumed its canonical form more or less simultaneously with the appearance of commentaries on it (tafsīr). He took as confirmation of this view Joseph Schacht’s conclusion

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3 See Welch and Pearson, 416–19, especially p. 411, referring to Gustav Flügel’s edition of the Qurʾānic text.


5 His bias is apparent in statements like the following: “In considering the question of the transmission of the Qurʾān according to Christian writers, the reader will feel that he is more in the domain of historical facts than in that of the precarious Hadith . . .” (Mingana, 34).

6 J. Wansbrough. Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation (Oxford, 1977); cf. J. Chabbi, “Histoire et tradition sacrée: La biographie impossible de Mohamet,” Arabe 43.1 (1996): 190–94. In a recent article Y. D. Nevo ( “Towards a Prehistory of Islam.” Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam 17 [1994]: 108–41) has attempted to confirm the interval suggested by Wansbrough by tracing the gradual evolution of rock-cut inscriptions in the Negev from “basic” (pre-Islamic) to “Muḥamman” to “Muslim” religious texts. Aside from the fact that these terms are not clearly defined, Professor Donner has noted (personal communication) that Nevo’s argument can be taken equally well to support the traditional view that early Islam and the Qurʾānic text evolved primarily in al-Madīnah and other urban centers, to which the Negev was entirely peripheral. The author is grateful to Professor Donner for calling this article to her attention.

7 Wansbrough, 47; cf. pp. 12, 18–20, 44–45, 49.


9 Wansbrough, 42, 45.

10 Wansbrough, 45.
that the Qurʾānic text did not serve as a basis for Muslim law before the ninth century.\footnote{Wansbrough, 44.}

Particularly crucial to Wansbrough's argument is the term "canonical," for which he assumes a high standard of precision. It is clear that even in the Muslim tradition the fact was acknowledged that readings of the Qurʾān continually diverged from a supposed original; it is clear also that steps had repeatedly been taken to impose or protect a unitary text of revelation—in the time of ʿUthmān, again in the time of Ibn Mujāhid, and even as recently as the 1920s, when scholars at al-Azhar prepared the currently most widely used edition. This edition is nonetheless not treated as uniquely "canonical" in parts of India and North Africa, where versions that differ in titles of the sūrahs, divisions between āyāt, and occasionally vocalizations are in use; furthermore, it is clear from surviving manuscripts that such variants have persisted through the history of Islam.\footnote{See, e.g., Welch and Pearson, 409–11; A. Jeffery and I. Mendelsohn, "The Orthography of the Samarqand Qurʾān Codex," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 62 (1942): 175–95; A. Brockett, "Aspects of the Physical Transmission of the Qurʾān in the 19th-Century Sudan: Script, Decoration, Binding and Paper," *Manuscripts of the Middle East* 2 (1987): 45, 52, nn. 2–3.} Wansbrough's difficulty appears to be that these divergences are not substantive but rather involve details that he perceives as formalistic, perhaps even trivial.\footnote{See, e.g., Wansbrough, 45.} Yet there is abundant evidence from the relatively well-documented period of the ninth and tenth centuries that such divergences were not perceived as trivial within Islam itself.

Perhaps the most valuable results of Wansbrough's study for the historian are his analyses of aspects of the text that, though already familiar, had not previously been so carefully delineated or explored in all their implications. One of these aspects is the polemical character of much of the Qurʾān, which, as Wansbrough convincingly demonstrates, was focused on Jewish scripture and tradition, implying an important Jewish opposition as one of the motivations behind the "canonization" of Islamic scripture. A second is the nature of the text itself, a series of "independent pericopes" placed side by side but expressed in a unified language and style.

The essential challenge to historians of the early Islamic period is to reconcile these undeniably useful observations with historical evidence that Wansbrough has not admitted into his analysis. Because of the relentless opacity of his own writing style it is tempting to ignore this challenge, but the implications of his argument are too far-reaching to permit such self-indulgence. It is important to recognize that his analysis was guided predominantly by generalizations drawn from the history of the biblical text, which were then applied to Muslim scripture. Most formidable is the conclusion, not stated explicitly but inescapable from Wansbrough's analysis, that the entire Muslim tradition about the early history of the text of the Qurʾān is a pious forgery, a forgery so immediately effective and so all-pervasive in its acceptance that no trace of independent contemporary evidence has survived to betray it. An important related issue involves the dating of early manuscripts of the Qurʾān. If Wansbrough is correct that approximately a century and a half elapsed before Muslim scripture was established in "canonical" form, then none of the surviving manuscripts can be attributed to the Umayyad or even the very early ʿAbbasid period; particularly, one controversial manuscript discovered in ʿSanʿāʾ in the 1970s, no. 20-33.1, for which a date around the turn of the eighth century has been proposed,\footnote{H. C. von Bothmer, "Architekturbilder im Koran: Eine Prachthandschrift der Umayyadenzeit aus dem Yemen," *Pantheon* 45 (1987): 4–20.} would have to have been copied at a much later period.

The purpose of the present study is to call attention to some types of evidence that Wansbrough did not take into account and that seem to contradict the historical conclusions that he has drawn from his essentially ahistorical analysis.

QLRʾĀNIC INSCRIPTIONS

Primary documents for the condition of the Qurʾānic text in the first century of Islam are ʿAbd al-Malik's two long inscriptions in blue-and-gold glass mosaic, which encircle respectively the inner and outer faces of the octagonal arcade at the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. They are still preserved in their entirety, except for the substitution of the name of the ʿAbbāsid al-Maʾmūn (198–218/813–33) for that of ʿAbd al-Malik; al-Maʾmūn did not, however, change the foundation date included by his predecessor, 72/691–92, which thus ensures that the inscriptions were actually executed in the reign of ʿAbd al-Malik. The main inscription consists of brief invocations combined with a series of passages taken from what are now various parts of the Qurʾān, all concerned...
with a single theme—challenging Christian dogma in the main Christian pilgrimage city.\(^{15}\)

The text was originally read as a single inscription by Max van Berchem, who began with the outer face of the arcade and thus located the foundation notice in the middle, supposedly followed by the Qur'anic verses on the inner face of the same arcade; this sequence has been accepted without question by most subsequent scholars.\(^{16}\) Van Berchem's arrangement contradicts the normal sequence of Islamic foundation inscriptions, in which the foundation notice occurs at the end. In fact, this mosaic text should be recognized as comprising two distinct inscriptions. As Christel Kessler has transcribed them, it is clear that the band on the inner face of the arcade contains the main message. The outer inscription is experienced first by those entering the building, who may read only the proximate segment, but the main text, on the inner face of the arcade, was meant to be read in its entirety by those who were returning as they had entered, which involved circumambulation of the middle ambulatory.\(^{17}\)

It begins on the south side of the octagon with part of the *shahādah*, the declaration of faith, in the same form in which it appears on the reform coinage of 'Abd al-Malik introduced five years later, and is followed by a series of excerpts from different parts of the Qur'ān as it is now constituted:\(^{18}\)

> In the name of God, the Merciful the Compassionate. There is no god but God. He is One. He has no associate" [beginning of the *shahādah*]. "Unto Him belongeth sovereignty and unto Him belongeth praise. He quickeneth and He giveth death; and He is Able to do all things" [a conflation of 64:1 and 57:2]. "Muhammad is the servant of God and His messenger" [variant completion of the *shahādah*], "Lil'ī! God and His angels shower blessings on the Prophet. O ye who believe! Ask blessings on him and salute him with a worthy salutation" [33:56 complete]. "The blessing of God be on him and peace be on him, and may God have mercy" [blessing, not in the Qur'ānic text]. "O, people of the Book! Do not exagerate in your // religion (dini//kum) nor utter aught concerning God save the truth. The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only a messenger of God, and His Word which He conveyed unto Mary, and a spirit from Him. So believe in God and His messengers, and say not 'Three'—CELLase! (it is) better for you!—God is only One God. Far be it removed from His transcendent majesty that He should have a son. His is all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth. And God is sufficient as Defender. The Messiah will never scorn to b/e a servant\(^{19}\) unto God, nor will the favoured angels. Whoso scorneth His service and is proud, all such will He assemble unto Him" [4:171–72 complete]. "Oh God, bless Your messenger and Your servant Je//sus son of Mary" (interjection introducing the following passage). "Peace

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\(^{18}\) The basic text presented here is that given by Kessler. The recent publication for the first time of a complete and clearly readable set of photographs (though misidentified and presented in incorrect order) has, however, necessitated a few corrections and alterations in her version; for the photographs, see S. Nuseibeh and O. Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock* (New York, 1996), 82–105. The translations of the Qur'ānic passages are those of M. M. Pickthall, with substitution of "God" for "Allāh" and "Book" for "Scripture."

\(^{19}\) This rendering seems more appropriate than "slave," given by Pickthall.
be on him the day he was born, and the day he dies, and the day he shall be raised alive!" [19:33 complete, with change from first to third person]. "Such was Jesus, son of Mary, (this is) a statement of the truth concerning which they doubt. It befitteth not (the Majesty of) God that He should take unto Himself a son. Glory be to Him! Wh/en He decreeth a thing, He saith unto it only: Be! and it is" [19:34–35 complete]. Lo! God is my Lord and your Lord. So serve Him. That is the right path" [19:36 complete, except for initial "and"]. "God (Himself) is witness that there is no God save H/im. And the angels and the men of learning (too are witness). Maintaining His creation in justice, there is no God save Him, the Almighty, the Wise. Lo! religion with God (is) The Surrender (to His will and guidance). Those who (formerly) received the Book differed only after knowledge came unto them, through transgression among themselves. Whoso disbelieveth the revelations of God (will find that) lo! God is swift at reckoning" [3:18–19 complete].

The outer inscription also begins on the south side:

"In the name of God, the Merciful the Compassionate. There is no god but God. He is One. He has no associate" [beginning of the shahādah]. "Say: He is God, the One! God, the eternally Besought of all! He begetteth not nor was begotten. And there is none comparable unto Him" [112 complete except for the introductory basmalah]. "Muḥammad is the Messenger of God" [completion of the shahādah], "the blessing of God be on him" [blessing]. //

"In the name of God, the Merciful the Compassionate. There is no god but God. He is One. He has no associate. Muḥammad is the Messenger of God" [shahādah complete]. "Lo! God and His angels shower blessings on the Prophet. O ye who believe! Except on him and salute him with a worthy salutation" [33:56 complete].

"In the name of God, the Merciful the Compassionate. There is no god but God. He is One" [beginning of the shahādah]. "Praise be to God, Who hath not taken unto Himself a son, and Who hath no partner in the Sovereignty, nor hath He any protecting friend through dependence. And magnify Him with all magnificence" [17:111 complete except for the initial "And say"]. "Muḥammad is the Messenger of God" [completion of the shahādah], "the blessing of God be on him and the angels and His prophets, and peace be on him, and may God have mercy" [blessing].

"In the name of God, the Merciful the Compassionate. There is no god but God. He is One. He has no associate” [beginning of the shahādah]. "Unto Him belongeth sovereignty and unto Him belongeth praise. He quickeneth and He giveth death; and He is Able to do all things" [confutation of 64:1 and 57:2]. "Muḥammad is the Messenger of God" [completion of the shahādah], "the blessing of God be on him. May He accept his intercession on the Day of Judgment on behalf of his people" [blessing and prayer]. //

"In the name of God, the Merciful the Compassionate. There is no god but God. He is One. He has no associate. Muḥammad is the Messenger of God" [the shahādah complete], "the blessing of God be on him" [blessing].

"The servant of God ‘A/ḥd [Allāh the Ímām al-Ma’mūn, Commander]20 of the Faithful, built this dome in the year two and seventy. May God accept from him and be content with him. Amen, Lord of the worlds, praise be to God" [foundation notice].

With minor variations, these Qurʾānic passages reflect the text as known from the standard Cairo edition, and it is possibly the existence of these inscriptions that led Mingana to propose that the original codification of the Qurʾān had taken place during the caliphate, not of Uthmān, but of ‘Abd al-Malik.

It is, in fact, puzzling that, although the inscriptions in the Dome of the Rock have been known to scholars for more than a century and have repeatedly been the subject of interpretation, little attention has been paid to the elements from which they were composed. On the inner face of the octagon the declaration of faith is followed by conflated verses describing the powers of God. Next the Prophet is introduced, with a blessing that, though not directly quoted from the Qurʾān, was clearly already in use in 72/694. Then comes an exhortation to Christians that Jesus was also a prophet and mortal, followed by the claim that God is sufficient unto Himself. Finally comes a command to bend to His will and the threat of reckoning for those who do not. The inscription on the outer face consists, as Kessler21 has pointed out, of six sections set apart by ornaments, the last being the actual foundation notice. Each of the other five sections begins with the basmalah. In each of the first four it is followed by the Ṣumayyad shahādah and a Qurʾānic verse arrayed in such a way as to form a self-contained and coherent statement, followed by a blessing on the Prophet. The fifth section is the complete shahādah alone. Each of these

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20 Brackets enclose the substitution by al-Maʾmūn.
21 Kessler, 11.
sections is thus a miniature composition encapsulating the major themes of the inscription on the inner face.

Within this context it is clear that the minor textual variations noted have been introduced to fit the sense. Such alteration of the standard Qur'ānic text in order to express a particular theme seems always to have been acceptable in Islamic inscriptions, however rigidly the actual recitation of the Qur'ān may have been regulated; even inscriptions of much later dates, when there is no question that a "canonical" text of the Qur'ān had been established, embody such variations.\(^{22}\) It is difficult to believe that the selection and coherent arrangement of passages in the time of ʿAbd al-Malik would not have influenced the "canonical" arrangement of the text had codification taken place in his reign or later. It seems particularly unlikely that the combination of phrases from 64:1 and 57:2, repeated twice, could originally have been a unitary statement that was then "deconstructed" and incorporated into different parts of the Qur'ān.

Nevertheless, the types of minor variation mentioned, juxtaposition of disparate passages, conflation, shift of person, and occasional omission of brief phrases, led Patricia Crone and Michael Cook to question the value of the mosaic inscriptions at the Dome of the Rock as evidence for the "literary form" of the text as a whole at that early date.\(^ {23} \) Their skepticism appears to have been engendered rather by two contemporary inscriptions on hammered copper plaques installed on the exterior faces of the lintels over the inner doors in the eastern and northern entrances respectively: "There is extensive agreement with our text in [the mosaic inscriptions] ...; on the other hand, there is extensive deviance from our text in [the copper plaques] ...."\(^ {24} \) Closer scrutiny of the two copper plaques suggests that the question is not one of "extensive deviance"; rather, one inscription is not primarily Qur'ānic in character, and the other is a combination of Qur'ānic fragments and paraphrases that makes sense only as a manipulation of a recognized standard text. The copper plaques include, respectively, seven and four lines of the Umayyad originals; in each instance the remainder of the text, no doubt including an original foundation inscription in the name of ʿAbd al-Malik, was replaced by an attached sheet of copper inscribed in the name of al-Maʿmūn—substitutions comparable to that at the end of the outer mosaic inscription.\(^ {25} \)

In the first instance, the plaque over the eastern entrance, the remaining lines (indicated below by paragraph breaks) of the original inscription contain the following text:

> "In the name of God the Merciful, the Compassionate [basmalah], "praise be to God than Whom there is no god but He" [tahmīd], "the Living, the Eternal,\(^ {26} \) the Originator of the heavens and the earth and the Light of the heavens

\(^ {22} \) Pace Busse, "Inschripten," 10. One example is an inscribed stone block dated 10 Jumāda II 550/11 August 1155, set into the north wall of the Great Mosque in the town of Cizre (Jazirat ibn ʿUmar), on the Tigris in southeastern Turkey; for an illustration, see E. Whelan, "The Public Figure: Political Iconography in Medieval Mesopotamia" (Ph.D. diss., Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, 1979), fig. 407. Of the eight lines inscribed on it the first is unreadable. The second introduces the main theme of the inscription, the Day of Judgment. Lines 6–8 include an invocation of blessing for the anonymous donor and the date. Lines 3–5 contain the following fragments from the Qur'ān, run together to express a single, coherent message: "On the Day when every soul will find itself confronted with all that it hath done of good ..." [the introduction to 3:30] "On the Day when We say unto hell: Art thou filled? and it saith: Can there be more to come?" [50:30 complete] "On the day when the wrong-doer gnaweth his hands ..." [introduction to 25:27] "the Day of the approaching (dooom), when the hearts will be choking the throats..." [excerpts from 40:18]. Professor Annemarie Schimmel very kindly helped in deciphering this inscription. See also A. Welch, "Qur'ān and Tomb: The Religious Epigraphs of Two Early Sultanate Tombs in Delhi," in Indian Epigraphy: Its Bearing on the History of Art, ed. F. M. Asher and G. S. Gai (New Delhi, 1985), 257–67. Professor Bellamy very kindly supplied the reference to Jalāl al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Suyūṭī, al-İṣlām fī ʿulūm al-Qur'ān, 2nd ed., ed. M. A. İbrahim (n.p. [Cairo?], 1363/1984), 1: 378–80, a fifteenth-century work in which recitation of the Qur'ān out of order and in mixed selection is generally condemned.


\(^ {24} \) Crone and Cook, 167, n. 18.

\(^ {25} \) For a complete publication and analysis of these plaques and their inscriptions, see van Berchem, 247–53, nos. 216–17.

\(^ {26} \) The end of the tahmīd and these two epithets have been interpreted by van Berchem and subsequent scholars as a quotation from 2:255 or the identical passage in 3:11; nevertheless, though most of the "beautiful names" of God can be found in the Qur'ān, it seems a mistake to attempt to identify every use of such an epithet as a Qur'ānic quotation. The epithets in this inscription, including the subsequent series of three in construct with "the heavens and the earth," can, like the tahmīd, be considered to have had an independent existence and need not be regarded as quotations wherever they occur.
and the earth and the Pillar of the heavens and the earth, the One, the eternally Besought of all” [a series of epithets]—“He begotten not nor was begotten and there is none comparable unto Him” [112:3–4], “Owner of Sovereignty”? Thou givest sovereignty unto whom Thou wilt, and Thou withdrawest sovereignty from whom Thou wilt” [3:26]; “all sovereignty belongs to You and is from You, and its fate is (determined) by You, Lord of glory

the Merciful, the Compassionate” [words of praise]. “He hath prescribed for Himself mercy” [6:12], “and His mercy embraceth all things” [7:156, with shift from first to third person], “may He be glorified and exalted” [words of praise]. “As for what the polytheists associate (with You), we ask You, oh God by

Your mercy and by Your beautiful names and by Your noble face and Your awesome power and Your perfect word, on which are based the heavens and the earth and through which we are preserved by Your mercy from Satan and are saved from Your punishment (on) the Day of Judgment and by Your abundant favor and by Your great grace and forbearance and omnipotence

and forgiveness and liberality, that You bless Muhammad Your servant, Your prophet, and that You accept his intercession for his people, the blessing of God be upon him and peace be upon him and the mercy of God and” [prayer] . . . .

The northern portal inscription begins in a fashion identical to that on the eastern portal but incorporates more passages from the Qurʾānic text:

“In the name of God the Merciful, the Compassionate” [basmalah], “praise be to God than Whom there is no god but He” [taḥmīd], “the Living, the Eternal”;28 “He has no associate,”29 the One, the eternally Besought of all” [epithets]—“He

begetteth not nor was begotten, and there is none comparable unto Him” [112:3–4, as in the eastern portal inscription]—“Muhammad is the servant of God” [introductory statement] “and His messenger, whom He sent with the guidance and the religion of truth, that He may make it conqueror of all religion,

however much idolators may be averse” [61:9, with an adjustment at the beginning to introduce Muhammad]; “we believe in God and that which was revealed unto Muhammad and that which the Prophets received from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and unto Him

we have surrendered” [2:136 or 3:84, with change of person and omission of the central section, where Ibrāhim, Iṣmāʿīl, Ishaq, Yaʿqūb, the “tribes,” Mūsā, and “Īsā are mentioned individually];30 “the blessing of God be upon Muhammad, His servant and His prophet, and peace be upon him and the mercy of God and His blessing and His forgiveness and His acceptance . . . .” [blessing].

The copper inscriptions do not appear to represent “deviations” from the current standard text; rather, they belong to a tradition of using Qurʾānic and other familiar phrases, paraphrases, and allusions in persuasive messages, in fact sermons, whether actual khutbahs or not.31 Of a number of such texts two examples cited by al-Ṭabarai should suffice to demonstrate the point.

In a sermon supposedly delivered to the people of Khūnahsirah in northern Syria in 101/719–20, ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāzīz included the phrase “nor will you be left aimless,”32 a clear reference to Qurʾān 75:36: “Thinketh man that he will be left aimless?”33 A more extended example, involving some of the same passages used at the Dome of the Rock, is the first part of a sermon

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27 This extract follows two epithets, “the One” and “the eternally Besought of all,” that also occur, in declarative sentences, in 112:1–2 but need not be considered a “deviation” from the Qurʾānic text; it is clear, however, that their inclusion in the series of “beautiful names” was meant to introduce the Qurʾānic passage.

28 Up to this point the inscription exactly duplicates that on the eastern portal.

29 Perhaps from 6:163, though again it seems unnecessary to seek a Qurʾānic origin for such a standard phrase.

30 In these passages of the Qurʾān the words are those of Muhammad, expressed in the first-person plural; in this inscription ʿAbd al-Malik speaks for the community of believers, and Muhammad is thus referred to in the third-person singular.


delivered by Dâ‘ūd b. ʿİṣâ, governor of Makkah, in 196/811-12.\(^{34}\)

"Praise be to God, Owner of Sovereignty unto whom He wills and withdraws sovereignty from whom He wills, who exalts whom He wills and abases whom He wills. In His hand is the good; He is Able to do all things" [3:26, with change from direct address to God to the descriptive third-person singular]. "I bear witness that there is no God save Him . . . there is no God save Him, the Almighty, the Wise" [3:18, with shift from the third-person plural to the first-person singular and concomitant omission of references to angels and men of learning as bearing witness]. "And I bear witness that Muhammad is His servant and His messenger, whom He sent to bring the religion, through whom He sealed the prophets" [further declaration of faith] "and whom He made a mercy for the peoples" [21:107, with shift from first-person plural to third-person singular].\(^{35}\)

A narrow focus on the Qurʾānic text and continued efforts to establish and preserve a standard version without deviation have persisted throughout the history of Islam, but side by side with that concern there has been a tradition of drawing upon and modifying that text for a variety of rhetorical purposes. Such creative use of familiar scriptural associations was hardly unique to Islam, and indeed it would be more surprising if no such tradition had developed. The tradition was, however, dependent upon recognition of the text by the listeners, or readers—a strong indication that the Qurʾān was already the common property of the community in the last decade of the seventh century. The inscriptions at the Dome of the Rock should not be viewed as evidence of a precise adherence to or deviation from the "literary form" of the Qurʾānic text; rather they are little sermons or parts of a single sermon addressed to an audience that could be expected to understand the allusions and abbreviated references by which ʿAbd al-Malik's particular message was conveyed.\(^{36}\) They thus appear at the begin-

36 For parallel evidence of adaptation of familiar Qurʾānic passages in early Arabic literature, see W. al-ʿQadī, "The Limitations of Qurʾānic Usage in Early Arabic Poetry: The Example of a Khârîjit Poem," in Festschrift Ewald Wagner zum 65. Geburtstag, vol. 2: Studien zur arabischen Dichtung, ed. W. Heinrichs and G. Schoeler (Beirut, 1994), 162-81 (p. 179: "... early Arabic poetry, like its counterpart Arabic prose ... tends to reformulate Qurʾānic materials more than to quote them literally"); idem, "The Impact of the Qurʾān on the Arabic Epistolology of ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd," in Approaches to the Qurʾān, ed. G. R. Hawting and A. Shareef (London, 1993), 205-313 (p. 307: "... no one could be a master at drawing from the Qurʾān in the manner that ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd is without having full control ... of the text of the Qurʾān ... he could appeal to what is familiar to his audience"). Professor van Ess kindly supplied references to al-Qaṭīf's work.
37 The essence of this reform was the adoption of purely epigraphic coinage without imagery.
39 For a reconstructed plan of the mosque, see Sauvaget, 91.
Spanish traveler, who visited the Haramayn between 307/920 and 317/929 and reported that the inscriptions consisted of "the short chapters" of the Qurʾān. According to this traveler, the inscription was written in five lines of gold on a blue ground contained within a marble panel; it was thus probably executed in gold-and-blue glass mosaic, as at the Dome of the Rock. This conjecture is confirmed by a report given by al-Ṭabarî: "[I]t was as if I had entered the mosque of the Prophet of God and I raised my head and looked at the writing in mosaic that was in the mosque and there was what the Commander of the Faithful al-Walīd b. ʿAbd al-Malik had ordered." Another parallel to the Dome of the Rock was the inscription's characters, described as squat and thick, in a stroke the width of a finger. The inscription belonged to the reconstruction of the mosque sponsored by ʿAbd al-Malik's son al-Walīd I (86–96/705–15) and carried out between 88/706 and 91/710 by his governor in the city, ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz. Because of this early date it is particularly significant, for three reasons. First, it suggests that the sequence of the Qurʾānic text from sūrahs 91 to 114 had already been established by 91/710. Second, the clustering of the short sūrahs in this sequence probably means that the arrangement of the entire Qurʾān generally in the order of the length of the sūrahs had already been adopted. Finally, sūrahs 1 and 113–14, which the compiler of one pre-ʿUthmānic codex, ʿAbd Allāh b. Masʿūdī (d. 32/653), had supposedly refused to accept as part of the revelation, had already been incorporated into the text. ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, the one Umayyad whose piety was respected even by the ʿAbbāsid enemies of his family, is unlikely to have admitted anything but the officially recognized version of the Qurʾānic text; indeed, the inclusion of these passages at the Prophet's own mosque may have constituted official recognition.

The choice of this extended passage for the qiblah wall is difficult to explain in terms of a single coherent message. It appears from a study of reports by Ibn Rustah and other observers that there had been an inscription of al-Walīd on the southern facade of the courtyard, which had been destroyed by Khārijites in 130/747, during the reign of Marwān II (127–32/744–50). It would have been appropriate in the Prophet's own mosque to adorn the entire courtyard, as well as the surrounding arcades and those of the sanctuary, with the complete text of the revelation, which the faithful could theoretically follow in sequence as they progressed through the building, finishing with the text on the qiblah wall, and several sources seem to support that conclusion. The fifteenth-century Egyptian historian Nūr al-Dīn ʿAlī b. ʿAḥmad al-Samḥūdī cited the early-ninth-century informants Muhammad b. ʿUmar al-Wāqīdī (d. 207/823) and Ibn Zabālāh to the effect that there were inscriptions inside and outside and on the doors of the mosque.


43 The earliest source for this story appears to have been Abū Muḥammad al-Fadl b. Shādhān (d. 260/874), but even by his time the actual facts about Ibn Masʿūdī's version had become blurred; see A. Jeffery, Materials for the History of the Text of the Qurʾān: The Old Codices (Leiden, 1937), 21.


might also be possible to interpret Ibn Rustah's report, "'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Aziz is the one who ordered to be written the inscription that is in the mosque and the one who ordered to be written the inscription that is on the qiblah wall of the mosque of the Messenger of God, the blessing of God and peace be on him," as evidence that there were inscriptions throughout the building.

The expression of political claims through Qur'ânic quotations and allusions suggests wide familiarity with these verses and their implications in the early Islamic community, between 72/691–92 and 132/750. In fact, although Wansbrough has noted, in his argument for a late compilation of the Qur'ân, that the text was not used as a basis for legal decisions before the ninth century, there is abundant evidence from the Umayyad period that it was already sufficiently familiar to the community at large to provide easily recognizable claims to political legitimation and for religious propaganda.46

COPYING THE QUR'ÂN

There is additional, more oblique evidence bearing on the issue of the Qur'ân text. The aforementioned inscription in the mosque at al-Madinah provides a starting point. Ibn al-Nadim reported in the late tenth century (before 380/990) that one Khalid b. Abi al-Hayyâj, šâhib 'Ali, had been responsible for executing it.47 Khalid was in all probability a younger brother of Hayyâj b. Abi Hayyâj (sic), named in another source as one of those who witnessed the testament of 'Ali b. Abi Ťalib in 39/660.48 Khalid also made copies of the Qur'ân text and other manuscripts for al-Walîd and 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azîz.49 It was Sa'd, a scribe in the employ of al-Walîd, who initially recruited him; in fact, Abû 'Abd Allâh Muḥammad Ibn al-Najîr (d. 643/1245) credited the inscription at the Great Mosque of al-Madinah to Sa'd himself, whom he identified as a mawla of Huwaytib b. 'Abd al-'Uzza.50 A member of Quraysh and a Companion, who died at al-Madinah in 54/674, in the caliphate of Mu'âwiya b. Abi Sufyân (41–661–80). Sa'd is also mentioned in the dictionary of nisbahs compiled by Abû

Abû Ghassân Muḥammad b. Yahyâ, who claimed to have the document in his possession, having received it from his father, a scribe, who had, in turn, received it from al-Ḥasan b. Zayd (d. 167/783), a grand-son of 'Ali; according to another source cited by Ibn Shabbah, it was Abû Hayyâj himself who witnessed the testament. The document cannot be assumed to have been genuine, but internal evidence suggests that, if it was a forgery, it was a forgery of the Umayyad period or the first twenty years of the 'Abbâsid period. For example, the testator called himself only 'Abd Allâh 'Ali Amir al-Mu'minîn. The 'Abbâsids adopted regnal names, though there is at least one instance in which al-Manṣûr called himself 'Abd Allâh 'Abd Allâh Amir al-Mu'mînîn; see al-Ṭabari, Leiden ed., 3: 208, Cairo ed., 7: 566. (Thanks are owing to Dr. Bates for this reference and his views on this point.) Ibn Shabbah himself complained of errors in the language and spoke of having copied the "letter forms" exactly as he saw them, implying that the document already seemed archaic in the early ninth century. For a summary of Abû Ghassân's background and career, see Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqâlânî, Tahdhib al-tahdhib (Hyderabad, 1326; repr. Beirut, 1968), 9: 517–18, no. 846; cf. T. Nagel, "Ein früher Bericht über den Aufstand von Muḥammad b. Abdallâh im Jahre 145 H.," Der Islam 46 (1970): 236–38.

46 From an extensive analysis of exegesis on sūrat Quraysh, Patricia Crone has concluded that "the exegesists had no better knowledge of what this sura meant than we have today. . . . What they are offering is . . . so many guesses based on the verses themselves. The original meaning of these verses was unknown to them or else there had been a gradual drift away from it. In any case, it was lost to the tradition. . . ." Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam (Oxford, 1987), 210. Her observations suggest a substantial interval between establishment of the Qur'ân text and the development of exegetical tradition at the end of the eighth century. They thus contradict Wansbrough's notion that codification of the text and the introduction of exegesis occurred at approximately the same time.

47 Ibn al-Nadîm, 9; cf. Sauvaget, 79–80, where this man is referred to as Khalîd b. Abî al-Sayyâj without further explanation.


49 Ibn al-Nadîm, 9. N. Abbott (The Rise of the North Arabic Script and Its Qur'ân Development, with a Full Description of the Qur'ân Manuscripts in the Oriental Institute [Chicago, 1939], 54. n. 83) had some reservations about Khalîd, noting that he "must have been a very young companion of 'Ali and an elderly scribe of al-Walîd" and calling attention to the omission of his name from the list of al-Walîd's scribes assembled by W. Björkman (Beiträge zur Geschichte der Staatskanzlei im islamischen Ägypten [Hamburg, 1928], 57–58). Björkman listed only al-Walîd's state secretaries in Damascus, however, whereas Khalîd was working in al-Madinah. Furthermore, it should be noted that šâhib means not only "companion" but also "disciple, follower" and that the context is Ibn al-Nadîm's discussion of books collected by a Shi'ite bibliophile of his own time, implying that he identified Khalîd as a Shi'ite. It seems from Ibn Shabbah's report about 'Ali's will that Khalîd's family was close to 'Ali.

50 Ibn al-Najîr, fol. 32a.
Sa'id 5Abd al-Karim b. Abi Bakr al-Sam'ani (d. after 562/1167), where he is identified as sahib al-masahif, from which the nisbah of his own mawla, Ziyad al-masahif, was taken. The authority cited was Ibn Abi Hatim (240–327/854–938), who in turn cited his father (d. 277/890). Ziyad was supposed to have transmitted ahdith to Bukayr b. Mismar al-Zuhri (d. 153/770) in al-Madinah, which is consistent with the chronological position of Sa'id.51

Although none of these reports can be traced back earlier than the mid-ninth century, it is nonetheless possible to pursue the matter farther. To begin with, Huwaytib was a member of the clan of 'Amir b. Lu'ayy and converted to Islam only after the battle of Hunayn. He was said to be one of sixteen Quraysh who knew how to write in the time of the Prophet.52 He was allied by marriage to a number of important early Muslim figures, and his family connections can be traced through several branches over many generations,53 despite certain legendary as-

51 Al-Sam'ani, Kitab al-ansab, facs. ed., ed. D. S. Margoulis, London (1912), fol. 531b, s.v. al-masahif. On Bukayr, see Ibn Hajar, 1: 495, no. 914; idem, Kitab lisân al-mizân (Hyderabad, 1330/1912), 2: 62, no. 236. Y. Eche, Les Bibliotheques arabes publiques et semi-publiques en Mesopotamie, en Syrie et en Égypte au Moyen Age (Damascus, 1967), 18, has interpreted the term sahib al-masahif as “librarian” and has identified Sa'id as al-Walid's librarian in Damascus. It is clear from the context of all these reports, however, that Sa'id lived in al-Madinah and that he was not a librarian but one who copied masahif, cf. especially al-Sam'ani, fol. 120a, s.v. al-jami‘i: “Perhaps it is the nisbah related to the collection, that is, the muṣaf. The most famous [person] with this nisbah is Abū Ḥabib Muhammad b. 'Aḥmad b. Mūsā al-Jāmi‘ī al-Masahifī, who used to copy the jami‘i.”

52 Ibn Shabbah, cited in Ibn 'Abd Rabbih (Cairo, 1363/1944), 4: 157–58. The specific source may have been the lost Kitāb Makkah.

53 He was one of two full brothers, the other being Abū Ruhm, who was married to Barrah bt. 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, a paternal aunt of the Prophet; another of Abū Ruhm's wives was Maymūnah bt. al-Ḥārith, who married the Prophet after Abū Ruhm's death. Huwaytib's sister was married to Sufyān (or Aswad) b. 'Abd al-Asad. There were also two half-brothers, Makhramah and Abū Sabrah (perhaps, rather, a nephew). A descendant of Makhramah in the sixth generation, Sa'id or Sa'id, served as chief qadi of al-Madinah in the reign of al-Mahdi; his son 'Abd al-Jabbār subsequently served as governor and then as qadi of al-Madinah in the time of al-Ma'mūn. Abū Sabrah served briefly as governor of al-BAṣrān in 17/638–39 and was commander-in-chief of the army that invaded Khūzistān in that year. His son Muham-

54 It is thus certain that he was a historical personage. Several anecdotes suggest that Huwaytib was known for his avarice; the most important of them for present purposes is the story that at some indeterminate date he sold his house in Makkah to Mu'awiyyah for the enormous sum of 40,000 dirhams and moved to al-Madinah, where he settled “on the Balāt near the aṣḥāb al-masahif,” a group with which his mawla Sa'id was linked.55

Huwaytib himself was married to 'Amina (or Aminah or Umaymah) bt. Abū Sufyān b. Harb, daughter of the supreme commander of the Meccan forces against the Prophet. 'Amina was thus a half-sister of the caliphs Mu'awiyyah and Yazid b. Abī Sufyān (60–64/680–83). She bore Huwaytib a son, Abū Sufyān, but was subsequently divorced. Abū Sufyān's grandson Abū Bakr b. 'Abd al-Rahmān was chief qadi of al-Madinah in the time of the caliph Hishām (105–25/724–43). Abū Bakr's grandson Muḥammad b. Abū al-Rahmān was killed at Nahr Abī Fuṭrus in Palestine in 132/748–49. Finally, this Muḥammad's own grandson Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Karim transmitted ahdith at Harrān in northern Syria.


55 al-Ṭabari, Leiden ed., 3: 2329; Cairo ed., 11: 518–19. This story, which was also reported by al-Ya‘qūbi (d. 292/905), can be traced to al-Waqīṭī; cf. W. G. Millward, “The Adaptation of Men to Their Time: An Historical Essay by al-Ya‘qūbi,” JAOS 84 (1964): 330, 336, where, according to the translation, Huwaytib bought, rather than sold, the house. Cf. Ibn Ḥazm,
From this report it seems that already in the seventh century there may have been a specific area of al-Madinah where manuscripts of the Qurʾān were copied and sold. A large fragment of an early history of the city, by Abū Zayd ʿUmar Ibn Shabbah al-Numayrī (173–262/789–875), a descendent of a prominent Madinan family, has been preserved.56 Although his descriptions of the toponography of al-Madinah are not always perfectly lucid, they are invaluable for their detail; of particular concern here is his mapping of the area surrounding the Balāt al-ʿAẓām, the paved street extending west from the Prophet’s mosque to al-Musallā. Among the residences facing onto the north side of the Balāt al-ʿAẓām was one near its western end belonging to Ḥuwaytīb.57 Ibn Shabbah did not explicitly mention the ʾašḥāb al-masāḥif near whom Ḥuwaytīb was reported to have settled, though he did use the term ʾašḥāb for various occupational groups. Particularly intriguing are the ʾašḥāb al-rabbāʾ, whom he located at the eastern end of the Balāt al-ʿAẓām, near the northwestern corner of the Great Mosque.58 It is not clear what they did; in fact, they were already problematic in the fifteenth century, when al-Samḥūdī, who was drawing upon Ibn Shabbah’s text, speculated that they might have been those who made and sold copies of the Qurʾān, which were sometimes known as rubāʾ.59 Even if he was correct, however, it is clear that the ninth-century ʾašḥāb al-rabbāʾ of Ibn Shabbah were not the ʾašḥāb al-masāḥif mentioned by al-Ṭabarī, for they were not located near Huwaytīb’s house on the Balāt.

There is growing evidence that al-Madinah functioned as an Islamic intellectual center in the Umayyad period, before the rise of the cities of Iraq. For example, M. S. Belguedj and Rafael Talmon have presented evidence for the existence of a distinct “school” of grammatarians at al-Madinah in the first half of the eighth century, anticipating the emergence of the better-known schools of al-BAṣrah and al-Kūfah.60 Talmon also claims that a number of men in this group earned their livings by copying the Qurʾān, but he has documented only one example, Abū Ḥāṣim (or Abū Dāʾud) ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Ḥurμuz b. Kaysān al-Aʿrāj, classified as one of the ṭābiʿān of al-Madinah, who died at Alexandria in 117/735 or 119/737.61 He was a mawlā of the Banū Ḥāshim and used to copy maṣāḥif.

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1 168–69. The detail about the ʾašḥāb al-masāḥif does not seem to have been preserved by al-Yaʿqūbī, however; al-Samḥūdī, 2: 746, cited it from the Ṭabaqāt of Ibn Saʿīd. There were apparently at least four recensions of Ibn Saʿīd’s text, the latest of which, that by Ibn Ḥayyawayh (d. 381/991), was used by Sачhau for his edition; that by al-Hārith b. Abī Usāma (d. 282/895) was used by al-Ṭabarī (J. W. Fück, “Ibn Saʿīd,” EI 3, 922). As the reference to the ʾašḥāb al-masāḥif is not given in Sачhau’s edition, al-Samḥūdī must have been quoting it from one of the other recensions.

56 Ibn Shabbah, 4 vols. (Beirut, 1410/1990). It seems to have been composed in al-Baṣrah, but there is little doubt that the author was intimately familiar with al-Madinah. Large segments of the text were reproduced by al-Samḥūdī, but it is only recently that the original has been published, apparently from a copy in the hand of the fourteenth-century author Ibn Ḥaḍrat al-ʿAṣqālānī (Ibn Shabbah, †: nun-afif). Certain details, including variations and errors in spelling, suggest that al-Samḥūdī worked from this same manuscript.

57 It was located between the compounds of al-Rabīʾ, mawlā of the Commander of the Faithful (al-Mansūr, 136–58/759–765) on the west (an anachronism of a kind not uncommon in Ibn Shabbah’s text) and of ʿĀmir b. Abī Waqqāṣ on the east. It was separated from the former by a lane that led to the house of ʿĀminah, daughter of Abū Ṣāḥib; the context suggests that ʿĀminah’s house may have stood to the north of Ḥuwaytīb’s compound. Across the Balāt to the south was the quarter of the Banū Zurayq, a tribal group originally from Yemen; Ḥuwaytīb’s compound apparently faced Dār Ḥafsah, owned successively in his lifetime by ʿUthmān b. Abī al-ʿAṣ, Muʿāwiyah, and the latter’s mawlā Ḥafsah, and the compound of Abī Hurayrah (Yaḍūt b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Hamawi, Muʿjam al-balūdān, ed. F. Wüstenfeld as Jacot’s Geographisches Wörterbuch [1866], 1: 245–46, 251–52; Ibn Shabbah, 1: 240–41, 252, 255–56). Ḥuwaytīb owned two other houses in al-Madinah, one of them in the quarter of the Banū Zurayq well away from the Balāt, the other, known as Dār Ṣubḥ, situated between the house of al-Muṭṭalib and the square before the Majlis al-Hukm (Ibn Shabbah, 1: 252–53). The precise location of this third house has not yet been established, but it seems not to have been on the Balāt.

58 Ibn Shabbah, 1: 231.

59 Al-Samḥūdī, 2: 745–46.


61 Muḥammad Ibn Ḥibbān al-Bustī [first half of the tenth century], Kītāb maṣāḥīḥ ʿulamāʾ al-ḥāsib, ed. M. Fleischhammer (Wiesbaden, 1959), 77, no. 559; al-Samʿānī, fol. 44b, s.v. al-aʿrāj. Ibn Ḥibbān’s source was again the ninth-century biographer Abū Ḥātim. Talmon erroneously cites Belguedj, 172–73, as the source for his larger conclusion that several grammatarians concerned themselves with “Qurʾānic scripts.”
It has been demonstrated that at least three individuals in al-Madinah copied the Qurʾān professionally in the last quarter of the first hijri century and the beginning of the second. It thus seems not at all impossible that there was already a concentration of such an occupational group in the city. In those early years there must have been sufficient demand for the newly codified scriptures, both for public use in mosques and schools and for private study by wealthy or pious patrons, to ensure employment for such a group.

The details cited here are scattered almost at random through texts of different character and period, and the references are too peripheral to the main accounts and the individuals too insignificant to have been part of a conscious, however pious, forgery of early Islamic history concocted at the end of the eighth century. All point to the active production of copies of the Qurʾān from the late seventh century, coinciding with and confirming the inscriptive evidence of the established text itself. In fact, from the time of Muʾāwiya through the reign of al-Walid the Umayyad caliphs were actively engaged in codifying every aspect of Muslim religious practice. Muʾāwiya turned Muḥammad’s minbar into a symbol of authority and ordered the construction of maqṣūrah in the major congregational mosques. ʿAbd al-Malik made sophisticated use of Qurʾānic quotations, on coinage and public monuments, to announce the new Islamic world order. Al-Walid gave monumental form to the Islamic house of worship and the service conducted in it. It seems beyond the bounds of credibility that such efforts would have preceded interest in codifying the text itself.

The different types of evidence cited here all thus lead to the conclusion that the Muslim tradition is reliable, at least in broad outline, in attributing the first codification of the Qurʾānic text to ʿUthmān and his appointed commission. The Qurʾān was available to his successors as an instrument to help weld the diverse peoples of the rapidly expanding empire into a relatively unified polity.

It is also possible to speculate that the inscriptions at the Dome of the Rock, so distinct in paleographic style from earlier examples of Arabic writing in any medium, owed something to this background as well. As al-Walid called upon a Qurʾān copyist to design his inscriptions at the Great Mosque in al-Madinah, it seems that fifteen or twenty years earlier ʿAbd al-Malik would have had to turn to a similar source. The only pool of such experienced writers that has left a trace, however faint, in the historical sources, is the ašḥāb al-mašāhif at al-Madinah. As professional copyists of the Qurʾānic text, these men must very early have developed a standard script with its own conventions—for example, horizontal extensions, hollow rounded letters, the use of strokes for diacritics on certain letters, and the marking of text divisions with simple ornaments. Where else could ʿAbd al-Malik have found an artist capable of laying out his beautiful inscriptions at the Dome of the Rock?

APPENDIX: THE GROWTH OF THE MUṢḤAF TRADITION

With the expansion of the empire, the professional copying of the Qurʾān also spread from al-Madinah to other cities. In the late Umayyad period, Malik b. Dinār (d. probably before 131/748), a mawlā of the Banū

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62 According to two reports from Mālik b. Anas, on the authority of Zayd b. Aslam (d. 136/753), ʿAmr b. Rāfīʿ and Abū Yūnus copied the maṣḥaf for the Prophet’s wives Ḥafṣah bt. ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 45/665) and ʿAṣimah bt. Abī Bakr al-Siddiq (d. 58/678), respectively; Muwaffā al-ʿImām Malik (Cairo, 1386/1967), 2: 344, nos. 999–1000. Ibn Saʿd reported that ʿAmr was the son of a mawlā of ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb and that ʿAṣimah herself was the source of the story about the maṣḥaf (5: 220); Abū Yūnus was ʿAṣimah’s own mawlā, but Ibn Saʿd does not mention his having copied a maṣḥaf for her (5: 218).

Najjyyah b. Sāmah b. Lu’ayy, was said to have supported himself by making copies at al-Baṣrah. 67 Al-ʿAṣbagh b. Zayd al-Warrāq al-Juḥani (d. 159/776), a mawlā of Juḥaynah, was a bookseller who copied the Qur’ān text at Wāsiṭ. 68 Ibn al-Nadīm distinguished copyists of masāḥif from those who copied the Qur’ān in scripts like muḥaqqaq and mashq. 69 From the former group, Khushnām al-Ḥaṣbānī and al-Mahdī al-Kūfī copied the Qur’ān during the reign of the ʿAbbāsīd caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (170–93/786–809). Khushnām was reported to have written his alifs one cubit high with a single stroke; although this report is obviously an exaggeration, 70 it does imply that he impressed by means of a monumental style. Beginning in the reign of al-Mahdī, all the masāḥif copyists in Ibn al-Nadīm’s list were from al-Kūfah, and the implication is that they wrote in a style distinct from cursive. They were Abū Jarī (or Ḥadi or Juday), who was active in the time of al-Muʿtaṣim (218–27/833–42), Ibn Umm Shaybān, al-Maṣḥūr, Abū Khāmirah, Ibn Khāmirah (or Ḥumayrah or Ibn Ḥumayrah), and Abūl-Faraj, the last “in our own time.”

Of these names the most famous is Ibn Umm Shaybān, which belonged to the Malikite qādī of Baghdad, Abū’l-Ḥasan Muḥammad b. Sāliḥ al-Ḥāshimi, who died in 369/979. He was a descendant of ʾĪsā b. Mūsā, designated by the first ʿAbbāsīd caliph, al-Saffāḥ (132–36/749–54), as heir to al-Manṣūr (136–58/754–75) but forced by the latter to renounce his succession to the throne and exiled to al-Kūfah. Abūl-Ḥasan’s family was thus ultimately descended from the Companion of the Prophet ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib. In no other extant report is it mentioned that Ibn Umm Shaybān copied the Qur’ān (though he is said to have recited it in the version of Abū Bakr b. Muḥājīd, the great reformer of the text), and his social status sets him apart from the earlier known copyists, most of whom appear to have been mawālī. 71 If he was the man whom Ibn al-Nadīm had in mind, rather than some other member of the same family, it is possible that he did such work early in his career. Abūl-Faraj ʿUbayd Allāh b. ʿUmar al-Maṣāḥīfī died in 401/1011, about twenty years after Ibn al-Nadīm himself, and thus was probably working just at the time that the latter was compiling his book. 72 It has not yet been possible to identify the other named masāḥif copyists, but it should be noted that the readings of their names are ambiguous. Nor can any of the copyists mentioned or their contemporaries be connected with surviving manuscript fragments. At present there is no convincing evidence for the survival of any Qur’ān datable earlier than the ninth century. All that can be stated with any certainty is that the earliest manuscripts that do survive, though the names of the men who copied them are totally unknown, represent part of a long, evolving tradition rooted in al-Madinah in the seventh century.

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68 Al-Samāʿīnī, fol. 579r, s.v. al-warrāq; cf. Ibn Saʿd, 7.2:61.
70 Ibn al-Nadīm, 9–10; for the various cubit measures in use in early Islam, all of them rather large for the present context, see W. Hinz, Islamische Masse und Gewichte umgerechnet ins metriche System (Leiden, 1970), 55–62. The smallest was 49.875 cm.
72 Al-Khaṭīb, 10:380 no. 5548.